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SUB-CULTURAL PATTERNS WHICH AFFECT LANGUAGE AND READING DEVELOPMENT.

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IMPROVING THE READING ABILITY OF CHILDREN OF THE "HAVE-NOT" POPULATION, ESPECIALLY THOSE OF CULTURAL SUB-GROUPS, REQUIRES THE TEACHER'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE CHILD'S SPOKEN LANGUAGE. CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED AND CULTURALLY DIVERGENT CHILDREN HAVE PRONUNCIATIONS AND VOCABULARIES DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF AVERAGE STUDENTS, BUT THE TEACHER SHOULD RESIST CONFUSING AND ALIENATING THESE CHILDREN BY URGING THEM TO CONFORM TO "MIDDLE CLASS" ENGLISH. INSTEAD, HE SHOULD EMPHASIZE SUCH ELEMENTS COMMON TO ALL SPEECH AS STRESS AND PITCH AND SHOULD TEACH THE CHILD TO SEE THE PRINTED PAGE AS AN EXTENSION OF HIS SPEECH. THE TEACHER SHOULD GUIDE THE CHILD TOWARD SEEING PHONOLOGICAL PHRASES AND WORD GROUPINGS INSTEAD OF INDIVIDUAL WORDS BY (1) EMPHASIZING INTONATION, (2) ILLUSTRATING THE NATURE AND VALUE OF RHYTHM, (3) DRAMATIZING READING, AND (4) TEACHING THE MEANINGS OF WORDS IN CONTEXT. (THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "LANGUAGE, LINGUISTICS, AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS, PROCEEDINGS OF THE SPRING INSTITUTES, 1963." CHAMPAIGN, ILL., NCTE, 1963.) (LH)

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Reading

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SUB-CULTURAL PATTERNS WHICH AFFECT LANGUAGE AND READING DEVELOPMENT*

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For many years, one small volume by Allison Davis has appeared on almost every bibliography I have made out for students, along with an equally small volume by Henry Lee Smith. The titles of these two books, like movie titles on a theatre marquee, almost combine to spell out my subject: *Social Class Influences on Learning* and *Linguistic Science and the Teaching of English*. It is too bad that Henry Lee Smith is not here also today; then I would have little enough to do.

An Interdisciplinary Tack

My approach to the effect of cultural differences on reading and language will not be that of the researcher, either in social science or in linguistics. It will be the approach of literary scholar thrust into teaching masses of freshmen, who concluded that the creation of literacy in the young is a problem involving whole persons in their cultural setting, and who set out to discover what scholarship had to say about that. Since no one field of study touches the human being and his language at all points, what I have to say will be interdisciplinary. It will also be theoretical and high-minded, but with some leavening of experience.

I cannot presume to tell you what descriptive or structural linguistics says about the problems we have gathered to discuss, because in fact linguistics itself says nothing. Linguistics is a research field, and when linguists are going about their proper business they are doing research, usually on sharply delimited problems about which their conclusions are quite properly restricted to what the evidence points to. Linguists may and often do express themselves on pedagogical matters, but without any inherent authority in their remarks. As linguists, they commit themselves to statements of exemplary rigor; as educational advisors, we may quite properly ask them for their teaching credentials before we attend too seriously to what they say.

It is thus that I speak to you quite openly as one who is not a scientist of any sort and especially not a linguist; call me a paralinguist, if you will, as one who searches the field of linguistics for what is relevant to instruction in literacy, to ferret out what is applicable, and then to make clear what linguistic findings are useful and how

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to use them; or perhaps you can think of me as "your friendly neighborhood linguist." My relation to the research linguist is something like the relation of the milkmaid to the cow: she depends on the cow for the milk, but she does not consult the cow in regard to the use she plans to make of the milk.

The Disadvantaged and Divergent

We speak of culturally divergent youth and also about culturally disadvantaged youth. These are not quite the same things, and I wish to distinguish them. A person may be culturally divergent without being disadvantaged thereby, or he may be disadvantaged without being divergent. Or he may be both at once. We can make some grievous errors if we assume that cultural divergency necessarily means cultural disadvantage. There is a long history of Chinese and Japanese migrants to the United States who have successfully assimilated our values without abandoning their own, and who have made almost no contribution to the history of juvenile delinquency. Cultural strength meets cultural strength, we might say, and accommodates it, in the main happily. Similarly with many of the present migrants coming to Miami from Cuba. They have a language problem, but it is temporary; they assimilate rapidly without excess damage to their pride.

The migrant Puerto Rican, on the other hand, is both culturally divergent and culturally disadvantaged. Coming to a different world using a different language, he has a devil of a time maintaining his self-respect, as he faces in the continental United States the way of life he finds here and the place we think he should accept in it. The migrant southern white and Negro in our northern cities is culturally disadvantaged without being in any important way culturally divergent or divergent in language. We head into trouble if we think of these three situations as "same" rather than "different." They are different.

For the Cuban, assimilation is on a level; he may even find that an accented or broken English has commercial value for him. The Puerto Rican meets a cultural monolith set mainly against him; a stranger and afraid, he penetrates the lowest level of the "have nots" in American society; the better he assimilates to that level the more difficult his further penetration may be. The migrant American is in a sociological sense culturally divergent, but only as an American assimilated to any American subgroup is; he is limited as much by his own expectations as by anything external to himself and his group. In terms of language, finally, the differences he shows are in themselves so trivial as to lay no special burden on him; his

language problems are created in the schools and forced on him there.

Economic and social change has brought many new faces into the penniless, prolific, migrant populations of our great cities: unemployment brought about by automation alone seems to be creating a new mass of hard-core unemployables of low education and unneeded manual skills. In the United States, as everywhere else in the world, the cities also seem to promise a life, bad as it is, preferable to hanging on in the countryside where life is even harsher. And there are always the refugees.

Forgive me for reviewing all this, which is surely known to you as well as to me, but I find it necessary to set my own thought into perspective. Other social forces affect these people also. Year by year the level of educational attainment creeps higher in the United States; nowadays more than half of each high school graduating class goes on to some kind of higher education. Thus each year more older people become a little more obsolescent in their education, and a little more resistant to retraining. As the high school diploma drops a little in value, the value of each lower grade drops also. Yet even the present flood of college graduates fails to meet the need for cultivated brainpower. Handpower less, brainpower more–handpower less, machines more. Whatever happens in the suburbs, bad things happen in the cities. In Detroit, half the 1958 graduating class of Miller High School had, up to 1961, never had a job. What of the ones who dropped out that year without finishing high school?

Our subject, then, turns out to be the literacy of children born to the have-not population in the older and more run-down sections of our great cities, what we should aim at, and how we should approach it. But even after saying so much, I cannot extract the thread of language and deal with it alone. A have-not population is not monolithic and homogeneous; it is a congeries of sub-cultures, defensively oriented in a hostile society. These cultures have their values, and these values are not all bad. Belongingness is a value; one must belong somewhere. Sharing is a value; at the table of the poor, there is always room for one more. Endurance is a value: it is good to get through one day more. Faith, loyalty, and silence are values; society is an enemy; say nothing to the cops. Companionship is a value, even in misery; you have to mean something to somebody. And love, in its myriad forms and expressions, is a value.

Keeping in Contact through Language Acceptance

And, finally, so to language; first, in regard to foreign language groups. When children come to school from coherent groups which

intercommunicate by means of a foreign language, the educational problem ought to be relatively simple, unless the school, as representative of the larger community, expresses contempt for the group and its language. If the group is large—as the Spanish-speaking population of the South and Southwest is large—then it is simple common sense to teach its language to nonspeakers at the same age levels as the foreign-speaking youngsters in English classes; it does a lot for these children to let them act as informants. Older children may be given special work in English as a foreign language. Modern techniques for this instruction have been pretty well worked out. Very young children need have no special attention; left to themselves, they will work their way into the give-and-take of school life, and shortly their English will not be distinguishable from that of their schoolmates.

It is, then, the spoken English of the central city which concerns us as it is used by the children who live there. It is different from the English of college-educated teachers, different in its sounds, in its "grammar," and its usage. The children have different terms for the same things, and terms for many things and processes not mentioned by adults, at least not in public and not in mixed company. Yet these differences, sub-cultural in origin, if you will, are not and need not be factors interfering with the literacy of these children. They will not stand in the way of reading and writing if they are accepted and let alone without remark. They are trivial surface differences compared to the great mass of underlying similarities between the language of these children and the language of educated adults. Many of them, in fact, are features of child language, and will pass out of use as the child matures. All are of course provided by the community in which the child is immersed; when you fight them, you take on the community. Not the larger community only, but the community of the school itself, of the turbulent, boisterous school corridors and playgrounds, and of the street, and the community to which it is the child's normal and proper desire to belong, to fit into, to disappear in.

There are two main reasons for accepting the speech of the child, simply and noncommittally, during his early language education, and, indeed, throughout all of it. The first is that it is his means of assimilating to all those persons to whom such security as he has is tied. He is, as I have said elsewhere, a kind of delegate from a speech community, an ambassador, as it were; when you touch him, you touch all those members of his family and his friends through him. Though his parents may say, "Git on down to that school and

let them learn you some good English," they may not tolerate much of it when he brings it into the house. His playmates will tolerate it even less. I am not against introducing such discord into a child's life if it leads to some desirable educational objective, but in this case it does not. Not much good will come to a colored youngster by "learning to talk like all us white folks"; our vocabulary may not lead *him* to success. Change of speech will follow, not precede, his decision to make his way out of the world he was born to. In any event, each person must *at all times* read his own speech off the page of his standard English print and put his own speech on the page when he writes. To change his speech in the process of leading him to literacy is to multiply the problems of literacy beyond his ability to cope with them.

The second reason for accepting the child's speech is that changing it is not necessary to reading instruction. He shares with his teacher all the features of language important to reading, no matter what dialect he speaks or what dialect his teacher speaks. Obviously children who speak Midland, Southern, Southwestern, mountain and rural dialects can learn to read without giving up their local speechways; otherwise the schools in the areas from which they have migrated to the cities might as well close down. Persons speaking all the dialects represented by in-migrants to the cities proceed to the highest degrees in universities in their home areas and to great national prominence. Standard written and printed English is the same for all of us, and I doubt that any English speech in the United States, cultivated or uncultivated, is closer to it than any other. A pretty good representation of London English of the fifteenth century, standard written English fits any modern spoken English quite loosely. Humanity adjusts as well to incongruities that Northerner, Southerner, New Englander, and people along the Eastern Seaboard—not to speak of the English, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, East Indians, and South Africans —all think that they speak what is written and that others do not.

Reading-Related Mechanisms: Intonation and Syntax

I wish now to demonstrate to you the features of English which transcend local, regional, and national dialects and are so ingrained in each child when he comes to school that they may be used as tools to make him literate. To do so, I will use some demonstrations of English intonational mechanisms and a nonverbal syntax on which I have been working with a Detroit artist, Eugene Whitehorn. These demonstrations have been designed for instruction. Showing only the aspects of speech which are used in English writing and print, they

emphasize *the commonest repeated elements in the commonest repeated patterns.*

English seems to use as signals four relative degrees of loudness which we call stress. We call these "heavy," "medium," "light," and "weak." Within a pitch range from high-frequency to low-frequency sounds, English also uses four perceptible changes of pitch level, up or down; we usually call these "pitches," and name them according to the level arrived at in the change: "low," "normal," "high," and "extra high." In general, the higher pitches accompany the heavier stress; that is, when we say one syllable more loudly than the others, we say it at a higher, rather than a lower pitch. Pitch level and loudness are thus separate from each other, but related; when we pull them apart from each other in speech, we get special effects. (See Plate Number 1.)

Speech does not come out of our mouths in a steady stream; utterances end, and parts of utterances end. In the manner of ending a stretch of sound, there are only two ways of cutting it off. We may stop the noise sharply, cleanly, or we may let it trail off into silence—fade, that is. As for the general pitch level of the stream of sound, we can do three things with that as we bring it to an end: we can keep it level, let it go up a bit, or let it go down a little. In English, when we keep the pitch level, we tend to cut it off sharply—with or without a bit of silence before the stream of sound starts up again. Otherwise we let it go up a little as we fade, or down a little as we fade. Notice particularly that I am not talking about pauses, but about what happens to the stream of sound just before it comes to the pause—if, indeed, there is a pause. English makes use of four of these cuts (called junctures); one of these, the so-called "plus" juncture, separates words or parts of words; three of them, called terminal junctures, bring to an end the units which we call phonological phrases. The sharp cut-off with pitch at a steady level is a *level,* or *phrase-terminal* juncture; it usually ends one phonological phrase followed immediately by another. A fading cut-off with a slight rise of pitch may end either a phrase or an utterance. We will call this a *fade-rise terminal.* And finally, a fading cut-off with a slight fall in pitch seems to end most statement-sentences. We will call this a *fade-fall terminal.*

Let me suggest a kind of hierarchy of these units of sound. Some override others in a peculiar way. Heavy or loud stress may shift about in the utterance; when it does, other stresses shift in relation to it. There can be only one heavy stress in a phonological phrase; if you

INTONATIONAL COMPONENTS

STRESS	PITCH	JUNCTURE
/ HEAVY	4 EXTRA HIGH	↘ "FADE-FALL" — UTTERANCE TERMINAL
^ MEDIUM	3 HIGH	↗ "FADE-RISE" — UTTERANCE TERMINAL
\ LIGHT	2 NORMAL	→ "LEVEL" — PHRASE TERMINAL
⌣ WEAK	1 LOW	+ "OPEN" — SUB PHRASAL "WORDS" SYLLABLES
		NORMAL TRANSITION

VERY FAST	ONE TWO THREE FOUR FÍVE↘
FAST	ONE + TWO + THREE + FOUR + FÍVE↘
NORMAL	ONE→ TWO→ THREE→ FOUR→ FÍVE↘
	ONE↗ TWO↗ THREE↗ FOUR↗ FIVE↘
DELIBERATE	ONE↘ TWO↘ THREE↘ FOUR↘ FÍVE↘

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PLATE 1

hear two of these, you can be sure that some kind of terminal intervenes between them. This is the key stress to listen for as you are forming words into groups. The terminals also override each other in relation to the speed of the utterance. A level or phrase-terminal replaces any lesser juncture as we speak a little more slowly and use more heavy stresses; a fade-rise terminal can replace a level terminal or any lesser juncture; and, as we speak very deliberately, a fade-fall terminal can replace any of the others.

To put it another way: there are as many phonological phrases in an utterance as there are heavy stresses; beginning in silence, the English utterance moves on to a heavy stress and beyond; at some point, near or far, the stretch of sound depending on this stress is wrapped up, clipped off, by one of the terminal junctures. Silence may follow, or a second burst of sound, with its heavy stress and its concluding terminal; another stress-marked, terminal bound stream of sound; perhaps another, then silence. No matter how many words or syllables intervene between silence and terminal, or between terminal and terminal, all loudness is kept down, all stresses depressed, except one.

This neat mechanism is what we might call the long wave of the utterance; it is the dominant rhythm. The phonological phrase may be as short as a single syllable: *All. is. Reading. Necessity.* It may be a phrase: *Saturday afternoon.* Or it may be a linkage of phrases: *The last day of the week.* The phonological phrase is thus contractible, expansible, and linkable. The utterance divided into phonological phrases is something like a string of sausages stuffed by a careless hand—some large, some small, some long, some short, but each set off by a neat twist of the casing from the sausage before and after.

There is also a shorter beat to the rhythm of the English utterance—the intrinsic stress patterns of individual words and groups of words. Words and word groups spoken alone form, as I have indicated, phonological phrases, and are coterminous with them. The heavy stress of the word or word group becomes the heavy stress of the phonological phrase. But when words or word groups are combined into longer phonological phrases, only one heavy stress remains; all others step down. No other stress can rise above medium without forcing or being forced by an intervening terminal: *Stress.* Secondary. *Secondary stress. Secondary stress or loudness.* Stress carries length or quantity with it; a stressed syllable is not only louder but longer than an unstressed syllable; and as stressed syllables are overlong in English, unstressed syllables are overshort.

This other rhythm of submergence or suppression of loudness changes the form or sound of words and makes mockery of an effort to relate specific spelling to specific sounds—letters, that is, to phonemes. The teacher says, "C A N spells *can*. You c'n understand that, can't you? How c'n I getcha t' r'member th't C A N spells *can*?" Or she says, "S U B J E C T spells sub*ject*. Now let's turn to another subject."

Let me illustrate these rhythms with a passage chosen because it is short and because I wrote it. It is from page 210 of *American English in Its Cultural Setting*. (See Plate Number 2.)

Another kind of machinery of communication is also at work in this passage—the syntactic mechanisms of English. The English utterance or sentence seems to be constituted of certain large sequences of order which Harry Warfel and I call *sentence functions*. Traditional grammar has varying names for these functions, but I think that they are most commonly called subject, simple predicate, indirect object, and direct object, but the relation of the four functions to these names is not very precise. A basic sentence may come down to only one of these four; no basic sentence has more than four. A complex sentence has a clause doing something within one of these functions; a compound sentence is just two or more basic sentences punctuated together on the page. It is not something especially real in speech.

For simplicity and clarity, we may call three of these four sentence functions *noun functions* and one a *verb function*. Familiar sentence patterns are made up of two, three, or four functions: two functions, NOUN and VERB: *Birds sing*. Three functions, NOUN, VERB, NOUN: *Birds sing songs*. Four functions, NOUN, VERB, NOUN, NOUN: *Mary gave mother a hotfoot*.

Any noun function may be carried in a sentence by a noun, a verb, an adjective, or an adverb; by a group (one of these words with its pre-modifiers); by a cluster (one of these with its pre- and post-modifiers); by a prepositional phrase, or by one of two basic types of clauses. The verb function may be carried by a verb or by a verb group (a verb with its pre-modifiers). Syntactically, then, we work down from the most abstract unit, the sentence function, to the unit which performs this function, to the class of word which individually or with other word classes makes up the syntactic unit, and finally—only finally—to the actual word which is spoken and heard.

Words do not give meaning to sentences; sentences demand words whose meanings will be found and defined by and within the sentence. Thus any approach to sentences by way of words and word

"Please," said Nadine softly, making the quiet word a command by a shrug of her lissome shoulders, "let us not discuss my husband's sad death further, Inspector Knuckleknob." She spoke the next words even more quietly, with her head bowed, her hands trembling: "May we talk about" — she raised her head and gave the inspector the full treatment of a wide-eyed stare; she breathed the last word in a whisper that set off all the cartridges in his Police Special — "you?"

PLATE 2

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SYNTAX AND PHONOLOGICAL PHRASES

(V)	V -ed	N	A/	V -ing	(N)	A	N	(N)	N	(P)	(N)	N	(P)	(N)	A	N -s	(V)	N	not	V
"Please,"	said Nadine softly,			making the quiet word				a command,		by a shrug of				her lissome shoulders,			"let us not discuss			

(N)	N -'s	A	N	A/	N	N -N	(N)	V -ed	(N)	A	N -s	A/	(I)	A/	(P)	(N)	N	V -ed/en	(N)	N -s	V -ing
my husband's sad			death further,		Inspector	Knuckleknob."	She spoke the next words				even more quietly,			with her head bowed,				her hands trembling.	

(V)	N	V	(P)	(N)	V ed	(N)	N	and	V -ed	(N)	N	(N)	A	N	(P)	(N)	A	N	(N)	V -ed	(N)	A	N
"May we talk about"				she raised her head			and gave the inspector				the full treatment			of a wide-eyed stare;			she breathed the last word						

(P)	(N)	N	(C)	V -ed	A/	(N)	(N)	N -s	(P)	(N)	N	N		N					
in a whisper,			that	set off,		all the cartridges,			in his Police			Special —		"you?"					

PLATE 3

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meanings is illusory. But let me now show you the word classes at work in our demonstration passage. (See plate number 3.)

I think that there can be no question about the complexity of language operations in this passage. I have used graphic means to expose the various kinds of things which go on simultaneously when the passage is spoken—simple notations for stresses and junctures, and various combinations of colors and forms to indicate the word classes in such a way that syntactic patterns are made obvious. It is this complexity which the reader must bring to that passage in order to find sense in the passage, in order to find out what the actual words —the dominant things which meet the eye—contribute to the sense of the passage. I emphasize this complexity because to my knowledge it is the key to the sense of the passage. Next to it, attention to letters and words is trivial, yet it is on letters and words that all textbooks and all guides to reading instruction which have come across my desk concentrate wholly.

We may not distinguish a good reader from a poor reader on the basis of what we have seen. I think that the good reader distinguishes on the page those elements which I have exposed for you and that he guides his eyes by them. By their means he picks up words in groups; his sense of intonation—his feeling for the phonological phrase —tells him which words to take together and which to shunt apart. And I think that the good reader stumbles by himself and at a very early age on this clue to the page. *By himself,* because nobody, to my knowledge, has known enough about it to teach him to use it; *at a very early age,* because the good reader ordinarily cannot explain why he reads the way he does. I think that reading teachers have been right in worrying about the student who moves his lips as he reads because he is reading each word as a phonological phrase. If he cannot find the author's intended phrasing, he will make his own and he will make it wrong. But I think that reading teachers have been wrong in worrying about all vocalizing and subvocalizing, because this is probably intonational and probably contributory to good reading.

There is considerable literature on the language learning of children. Scholars generally agree that the child who goes to school is in full command of the system of his language—as presented to him by his family and his community—and has it so thoroughly internalized that he uses it without thought. He thus has it *in him* to apply to the process of becoming literate; as he learned his speech from experience with people who speak within and about a milieu, we may expect that he will learn written language from reading books com-

posed within and about human society. His speaking vocabulary when he comes to school is already old and already beyond measure; he needs only to learn how the words that he knows (their pronunciation varying as their place varies within intonation patterns) relate to writing and print. It is reasonable to assume that as he learned the syntax and vocabulary of speech through engaging in the processes of hearing and speaking, he will learn the grammar and vocabulary of writing through engaging in reading and writing, and not through dictionary study, word lists, and grammar. Our problem is to set him as free in reading and writing as he is in hearing and speaking.

From Word to Meaning

I come at last, then, to words and their meanings. A theory of language and reading must of course embody a theory of words and meanings compatible with the whole. That is, if one thinks, as I do, that children learn words from reading and do not learn reading from word study, he ought to be able to state his reasons. Here I must go back to a chapter in *American English in Its Cultural Setting*, "Meaning, Structural and Otherwise," for my rationale. To me, the word is simply one element in a hierarchy of elements which make up the sentence, in itself of no particular importance.

For many years I puzzled over the question how the stream of noises which make up the sentence can communicate meaning. I decided finally that the sentence is a handy-dandy meaning generator, the words within it conveying meaning not so much by what they assert as by what they deny and exclude. This is a kind of reversal.

In effect, the sentence is a kind of game of twenty questions. You recall that it is possible in that game, within twenty questions (if they are well chosen), to zero in on a particular person or object in the mind of someone else: when animal or mineral is stated, half your problem is eliminated. Then by taking one-half the terrestrial globe, you exclude the other half, and by eliminating large masses of possibilities, you finally get down to the point where an educated guess has a high probability of success.

The sentence operates similarly. Words are highly abstract items; each has a wide range of recorded significances—which is to say that outside a sentence, a word has no valid specific significance. If I give you the word *man* in isolation, you cannot possibly guess what meaning I have in mind for it. In the sentence, "Man has lived on this earth for fifty thousand years," *man* obviously means the human race; the term embraces *woman* as well. In the sentence, "Man never manages to get along with woman," *man* indicates the male half of the

human race. I can run you through a dozen sentences, in each of which *man* has a different significance.

Indeed, all common words are multi-referential; to express specific meaning, their range of possible significance must be curbed. The instrument for doing this curbing is the sentence, and the device is like the game of twenty questions. Each meaning element (intonation, pattern of order, function, word class, and word) cuts away from each other meaning element anything which is incompatible with itself. In the end, the shrewd hearer or reader may know everything about a word except exactly what it does mean—its place in the sentence, in the sub-unit, in the word class, and in the general area in which it is significant. In fact, he may be so close that he mistakes it for its exact opposite.

One illustration should suffice. A colleague came to me troubled about a student. He had assigned the general subject, "The special virtue of one character in the *Odyssey*." This student, a girl, had chosen Penelope and had written about her *promiscuity*. That was her virtue. The writer had spoken of her fidelity to her husband, her rejection of the suitors, her devices for stalling—weaving the web by day and unweaving it by night—and all her single-minded defense of her chastity. These, to the student, were summed up in the term *promiscuity*. The teacher said, "What shall I do? Send her to the dictionary?" I said, "No. Tell her what it means. She will say, 'Oh migod!' " He did, and she did. Note that she knew everything about the word, down to the area in which it had meaning, but she chose the exact opposite of its significance. When she seemed furthest off, she was actually as close as she could get—without being right.

The means by which we learn words from reading has been defined by Martin Joos as "bridging the gap with the minimal semantic burden necessary." Thus if we meet the word *stroll* in "He strolled in the garden," we can use *was* to carry the minimal semantic burden, reading "He was in the garden." Later we may meet, "He strolled through the town," and we have added a sense of motion: "He moved in some as yet unspecified way through the town." Little by little, as we meet the word in different contexts, we will narrow its meaning-range down until we have it cold. The linguistic principle here is that the meaning of a form lies as much in its distribution—in the kinds and classes of other words and structural signals among which it appears—as in the history of experiences with its distribution. Many words can give significance to a sentence on a minimal basis without reflecting other significances relevant in other contexts.

From all this, you will have little trouble in defining my general stance on reading instruction. Reading instruction must be closely tied to speech in order to be successful. It should begin with familiar materials, the more familiar the better. It should not involve an attempt to change the children's speech, because that speech is the teacher's strongest ally; the child must learn to see the way he normally talks in the print on the page. Instruction should relate to the total speech system, dealing honorably with the fluctuating relations between letters and the sounds of actual speech. It should rest heavily on intonation, and the students should be provided with intonation contours rather than be permitted to puzzle out their own. The teacher should talk out in normal speech patterns what is on the page and encourage the children to do so also. No "reading singsong" should be permitted to develop. Reading instruction should consist almost entirely of reading, and not of related but ineffectual busywork. Words should never be treated in isolation. Words should be handled in signal groups that are also meaning groups. At any stage, the teacher should settle on general meanings of sentences and of passages and whole stories, rather than on specific meanings of specific words—meanings which may not be the same for the same words in the next passage.

In order to operate this way, teachers must know the *sound system* of English, especially and specifically that of the children's speech —and they should let it alone. Reading instruction should not be combined with speech correction, or with an effort to change the dialectal peculiarities of the children's speech toward any other, regardless of the difference in prestige. Reading teachers should know the *syntax* of English speech well enough to manipulate the language somewhat at various syntactical levels and to create patterns for practice.

And finally, reading teachers should have enough uninhibited "ham" in them, enough of the dramatic impulse, to exaggerate, to push loud stresses up to extra loud and high pitches up to extra high: "The sky is falling," said Henny-Penny. "Let's go tell the King!" "Let's," said Foxy-Loxy, "but first, let's stop at my house for dinner." And teachers should nourish the dramatic impulse in every child, the impulse to push his own loud stresses up and his own high pitches higher, and to emphasize the strong, unsteady, slightly loping, thoroughly internalized rhythm of his native speech. And they should make sure that every reading lesson is a lesson *in* reading, not a lesson *about* reading.

If reading actually is, as I believe it is, a native language process, then the youngster, who must carry to the page the signals that he finds on the page (if he is ever to find them there) can be helped to discover in his own free speech all he needs to make him a good reader. For the nature of each language is compulsive on the native speaker; he must work in terms of it. The teacher, too, must work in terms compatible with the native language, the familiar speech of the child. He must do so knowledgeably. Otherwise he will blunder along with it unawares, he will crisscross it irrelevantly without knowing that he is doing so, or he will blunder head-on into it.

We cannot afford such blunders. Our society places increasing demands upon literacy as we become more and more the makers, the custodians, and the managers of machines; in our world of vast and ever vaster organizations, literacy becomes day by day more essential to meaningful citizenship. Each reading cripple is a badly wounded person, a social reject in his own mind and in the minds of others; we cannot afford such cripples. If blundering with language tends to favor the development of reading cripples, reading instruction is obligated to discover the harmonies of language and move in harmony with them.

With all these regularities of language working for them, it is clear that it is not the dialectal or sub-cultural patterns of the culturally different children which affect their reading development. These youngsters have the main bases for learning which are brought to school by all children except very special ones (who require special treatment beyond the capabilities of the classroom teacher). They can be led into literacy; if they are not, they may well be led into delinquency. I have seen a rather closely held study of children in trouble which provided all information about each child: age, crime, previous crimes, kind of family, sibling relationship, church affiliation, and so on. In all these factors no consistency is to be found; the child may be from a good or poor home, may have one or both parents, may be first, middle, or last child, may or may not be a churchgoer, and so on. One thing only is consistent: each child was from two to seven grades below his proper level in reading. In our society, the value placed on literacy is so high that failure to read well produces a badly wounded person who may hit back in one way or another.

Teacher Attitude—An Obstacle

There is one sub-cultural factor which does affect the language development of these children, and it is one which I wish to touch on now. This factor is the set of attitudes toward language held by

the teachers whom Davis would call "aspiring middle class,"—as many teachers are. These attitudes are partly learned in the school and college training of English teachers with its monolithic fixation on "correct English" as the main proper outcome of education in English and the language arts. It is a fixation so deep that it is not felt as a subject for question; it overrides whatever work in child development, educational psychology, or methods the teacher may have had, even if these have been more enlightened about language than usual. It is a fixation often nourished in the teacher's own sense that only by parting with his origins, learning correct English, and moving out of the neighborhood has he been able to cut himself off from the foreign, rural, or working-class ways of his parents. And it frequently expresses itself as a demonstration of real love and concern for the children, that they, too, should come up and out and away from a manner of life that is poverty-stricken, universally condemned, and dead-ended. Negro teachers especially, insisting that they cannot even understand the children whom they understand only too well, bear down brutally on the divergent phonology, "grammar," and usage of Negro children, communicating their own tension to the construction of the child's ultimate trauma about language. In most instances, all the mores of the school sustain them in this unfortunate practice where they should resist it. The alternative to this overemphasis on conformity to "middle class" speech, too, is unfortunate, the idea that the children are so low on the intelligence scale that their case is hopeless, and that the most the school can do is prepare them for the same manual occupations their parents engage in, keeping them off the streets and out of trouble as long as possible.

Certainly not every "linguistic approach" to the reading and language development of culturally different children will make them happy readers and effective writers. Linguists themselves tend to teach as they were taught rather than use the knowledge which descriptive linguistics provides. Much in current linguistics, misapplied in the classroom, tends to reinforce precisely those practices which will impede rather than advance the learning of the children. But if linguistic findings as a whole are drawn on and employed in a manner consistent with findings in other social sciences and psychology to create an environment favorable to language learning in the schools, then a whole new posture on the part of the teacher becomes possible. It is a posture much decried among the right-wing educational theorists: it is fundamentally nondisciplinary and permissive in regard to speech, marked by a courteous and studious respect for the children's speech-

ways, to the extent of defining and recording exactly what they do say. It involves a great deal of reading with and to the children, to provide them with the delights and cultural nourishment other children get at home—the fairy tales, rhymes, and legends of literature. It begins where they are in language wherever they are. It rests on the really rich and viable culture that almost any child carries within him to school, and it respects that culture. It relates the children's actual language to the printed page, and it lets the reading child talk the way his parents talk instead of "sounding out words" painfully, one by one, tonelessly, with strange and difficult sounds.

At present, if a child is in trouble with the community, the police, or the school, the school shows its harshest face to him in the language arts and English class. It is here that he finds the least praise and the most blame. The sub-cultural patterns which bring this about are not those of the children and they are not unchangeable. It is the patterns of the teachers which must change. Rather than let the athletic field or the shop represent the one place these children can excel, we can let them in on literacy. To do so, teachers need new knowledge, new attitudes, and new materials; but if the tieup between reading difficulties and delinquency is as close as it seems to be, we have no choice but to find out what we need to know and do what we need to do about reading.